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ABSTRACT

A study on proposed accreditation standards grew out of a need to (1) stimulate the growth of quality correspondence degree programs; and (2) provide a policy for accreditation of correspondence degree programs so that graduates would be encouraged to pursue advanced degree programs offered elsewhere by educational institutions. The study focused on educational standards only and not business, fiscal, or advertising practices. In the final report it is recommended that: (1) the guidelines outlined be used by the appropriate accrediting agencies; such as regional agencies; (2) the Accrediting Commission of the National Home Study Council be the single agency to authorize the granting of correspondence degree programs offered by private home study schools; and (3) the proposed standards be used in measuring the effectiveness of degree programs. The full text of the proposed standards and commentary is presented. (HSE)

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Report for the
Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education
under the
Department of Health, Education, and Welfare

Proposed Accreditation Standards for Degree-Granting Correspondence Programs Offered by Accredited Institutions

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education
under the
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Proposed Accreditation Standards for Degree-Granting Correspondence Programs Offered by Accredited Institutions

by
The McGraw-Hill Continuing Education Center
3939 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20016
202-244-1600

June 30, 1975

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FOREWORD

The enclosed report entitled "Proposed Accreditation Standards for Degree-Granting Correspondence Programs Offered by Accredited Institutions" was prepared by the McGraw-Hill Continuing Education Center, Washington, D.C. It represents a one year effort in FY 1974 for the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education under the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Assisting McGraw-Hill in developing these accreditation standards was an Advisory Board consisting of prominent educators in the field of nontraditional education. A list of the Advisory Board members is included in this report.

This study on proposed accreditation standards grew out of a need to (1) stimulate the growth of quality correspondence degree programs and (2) provide a policy for accreditation of correspondence degree programs so that graduates, by receiving full college transfer credit, would be encouraged to pursue advanced degree programs offered elsewhere by educational institutions.

It seemed reasonable to the study staff that a proprietary institution could formulate a correspondence degree program and provide educational materials and services so that it could receive national accreditation from agencies of higher education in the same context as accreditation is received by residential nonprofit institutions. But to date no proprietary institution has received such accreditation, nor have any studies been conducted and published, prior to the enclosed study, on the methodology and criteria by which this type of institution could receive postsecondary education accreditation. This study also has application for nonprofit institutions since there exist, we believe, no singular standards for them on correspondence degree programs.

The study group focused their attention on the educational standards per se of the correspondence degree program. They did not consider institutional standards relating to business, fiscal, and advertising practices, which are already in existence, and would be examined by accrediting agencies as these standards relate to educational programs.

In order to make the accreditation process more manageable, the study recommended three conditions of eligibility before correspondence degree programs should be evaluated for accreditation: state licensure, institutional (not program) accreditation, and voluntary request by the institution for program accreditation.

The Advisory Board met five times during the year. A one-day workshop conference was held in Washington, D.C., to review and comment upon the standards. Some of the comments of the participants are incorporated in the standards. A list of attendees is included in this report.

The following are recommendations for consideration:

1. The guidelines on proposed accreditation standards should be used by the appropriate agencies. Specifically, the National Home Study Council should adopt these standards for recognizing private home study schools, and regional accreditation agencies under the Council of Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA) should incorporate these standards as part of their existing standards for accrediting institutions.
2. The Accrediting Commission of the National Home Study Council should be authorized as the single agency to authorize the granting of correspondence degree programs offered by private home study schools.
3. The proposed standards should be used as measurements for effectiveness of correspondence degree programs. Resulting will be more substance and definition to accreditation procedures that will make the evaluation process more comprehensive, realistic, and enforceable.

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DEGREE-GRANTING CORRESPONDENCE PROGRAMS
OFFERED BY ACCREDITED INSTITUTIONS

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PROPOSED ACCREDITATION STANDARDS FOR DEGREE-GRANTING CORRESPONDENCE PROGRAMS OFFERED BY ACCREDITED INSTITUTIONS

Meaning and Nature of Correspondence Degree Program Accreditation

Accreditation is the process by which an agency evaluates and recognizes an educational institution or program of study as meeting certain predetermined criteria or standards. Accreditation is a voluntary process. It arose in response to the need for the establishment of third-party validation of the quality of educational institutions. Two types of accreditation are generally recognized today by institutions and agencies: institutional accreditation, which assesses an institution as a whole; and specialized or program accreditation, which focuses on the quality of specific curricula.

The purpose of these guidelines is limited to correspondence degree programs offered by accredited institutions at the postsecondary level. This document represents the first attempt to delineate special accreditation standards for degree-granting correspondence programs. These standards are intended for use with programs where the correspondence mode amounts to the majority of the instructional mode. The institutions eligible to have these degree programs accredited must have received or been in the process of receiving institutional accreditation by a nationally recognized accrediting agency. Therefore, this document purports not to duplicate institutional standards that may relate to accreditable institutions, such as standards on business, advertising, and fiscal practices, although it recognizes that these standards are important to the evaluative educational process.

Today, many alternatives to traditional education such as "colleges without walls," "organized postsecondary education," "open universities," "proprietary education," "external degree programs," and "independent study" are labeled "nontraditional study" and have growing acceptability. These educational delivery systems have been triggered by the rapid growth of higher education, the financial strains on education, the great increase in

learning and in the rate of learning that takes place outside the classroom, and the demands of society for more diverse educational opportunities. A basic, underlying instructional mode common to many of these new opportunities is correspondence. As a result, correspondence education, a long established mode of instruction, is being reassessed by traditional educators and is, therefore, facing growing opportunities.

Correspondence education is learning that is focused on individuals. It is self-paced because it permits the student to progress in his own way and at his own pace. The correspondence student studies from specially prepared materials. These materials comprise a number of units of study or lessons. As the student completes his lessons, he forwards his lesson examinations or projects to correspondence instructors who correct, comment upon, grade, and return them to him. This two-way communication between the student and the instructors gives direction to the student and differentiates correspondence education from self-education, where the student studies completely on his own.

Correspondence education may be the only feasible means by which some students can receive postsecondary education. Often a student enrolls in a correspondence program because prolonged attendance at a residential school will interfere with his present job or home life. Also, he may not attend residential school because it is not physically accessible to him. And some students simply prefer individualized, independent learning.

No standards or guidelines exist by which correspondence degree programs can be assessed. At present, no accrediting commission assesses correspondence degree programs. Existing accrediting commissions could be granted authority over accrediting degree programs. There seems to be no need to create an additional accrediting agency for this function. Voluntary, nongovernmental accreditation is the means recommended by which correspondence degree programs of accredited institutions should be assessed for the following purposes:

1. To legitimize correspondence degree programs by protecting their students against substandard and transient programs and against unethical, deceptive, or fraudulent educational practices.

2. To foster excellence in correspondence education through the development of criteria and guidelines for evaluating educational effectiveness.

3. To encourage improvement of correspondence education through self-study and self-evaluation.

4. To assure the educational community, the general public, and other agencies that a correspondence program has clearly defined and appropriate educational objectives; has established conditions under which these can be reasonably achieved, and appears in fact to be accomplishing them substantially; and is organized, staffed, and supported so that it can be expected to continue to do so.

5. To provide counsel and assistance to established and developing correspondence programs.

Text	*Commentary*
I. Conditions of Eligibility for Evaluation of Correspondence Degree Programs	
(1) The institution should have a charter, license, and/or formal authority from the appropriate governmental agency to award a degree by correspondence instruction.	*The procedure an institution must follow to receive formal authority to award a degree is intended to serve as an initial screening process for accreditation. The initial authority generally comes from a state approving agency. The procedure to follow varies with each state. States where legislation does not currently exist which would allow degrees to be granted through correspondence are referred to "Model State Legislation," Report of the Task Force on Model State Legislation for Approval of Postsecondary Educational Institutions and Authorization to Grant Degrees, dated June, 1973, which can be obtained from the Education Commission of the States, 1860 Lincoln Street, Suite 300, Denver, Colorado 80203.*
(2) The institution should be accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency.	*These standards are limited in scope in that they apply only to the educational aspects of correspondence degree programs. Such factors as physical plant, financial stability, and promotional practices are not a part of these standards, but are included in the standards of the various nationally recognized accrediting associations. It is assumed that the institution has already been accredited by one of these agencies and that these institutional standards have been met.*

(3) The complete specific degree program should have been in operation at least two years prior to the application for degree program accreditation, and the institution should have graduated sufficient students to validate the program.

The degree program should be in operation long enough to provide evidence of the credibility and stability of the program. The two-year waiting period is a requirement of the National Home Study Council before an institution can be accredited and of the Veterans Administration before a program can be approved. Hence this standard follows that of these agencies.

II. Program Requirements

Minimum requirements for a degree program should be equivalent to those requirements for generically similar degrees of residential institutions and should be clearly stated.

An institution is free to pattern their degree to meet their individual objectives. It is assumed that an associate degree would be equivalent to approximately two years of resident study and that a baccalaureate degree would be equivalent to approximately four years of resident study.

Communication and analytical skills are recognized as important components of all degree programs. Institutions should identify and describe such skills and levels of achievement necessary to meet the requirements for each degree program.

III. Program Objectives

Degree program objectives shall be clearly defined and simply stated. They describe results sought which can be attained by reasonably diligent students. The character, nature, quality, value, and source of the instructional program and educational service shall be set forth in language understood by the types of students enrolled. If a program prepares students for an occupation or field of occupations, the objectives clearly state the types of occupations for which preparation is given.

The objectives for each degree program should be clearly spelled out. There should not be one broad set of objectives covering several degree programs. Institutions should be discouraged from creating new degree titles.

Degree program objectives must be of such a nature that they can be achieved through correspondence or a combination of correspondence and residential study. Residential instruction should supplement the correspondence program whenever it is necessary to attain the stated program objectives. In such cases, the institution must disclose to the prospective student that the program is a combination of correspondence and residential instruction and that completion of both phases is a degree requirement.

As an example, it is clear that a degree in aircraft engine technology cannot be granted on the basis of correspondence study only, but also requires residential study in which the student can demonstrate competency by performing experiments and projects.

Program objectives must be reasonably attainable. Appropriate objectives include the development of skills, the provision of job-related training, the imparting of information, instruction in the application of knowledge, and the level of competence expected of the typical graduate. Evaluation of the educational program is based on the expressed program objectives and the success with which the objectives are fulfilled.

IV. Educational Materials

(1) Level of Instructional Materials

Instructional materials shall be of college level.

(2) Comprehensive Instructional Materials

Instructional materials should be sufficiently comprehensive to achieve the expressed program objectives.

(3) Up-To-Date Instructional Materials

Instructional materials should be accurate and reflect current knowledge and practice.

(4) Authorship

Instructional materials should be prepared by qualified persons competent in their fields. Materials other than standard textbooks produced by recognized publishers should be prepared by correspondence educators skilled in preparing materials for correspondence use and reviewed by subject matter specialists.

In the evaluation process, the educational materials should be examined by experts in home study education as well as subject matter specialists.

(5) Reading Level of Instructional Materials

The reading level of the instructional materials is keyed to the program objectives. Accepted reading comprehension measurements of course materials should be conducted and available for review.

(6) Hands-On Training

Instructional aids such as kits, equipment, tools, and laboratory experiments should be provided if necessary to meet the stated program objectives.

(7) Study Instructions

Suitable instructions should be provided to the students on how to study each course effectively.

(8) Organization of Instructional Materials

The organization and presentation of the instructional materials should be in accordance with sound principles of learning.

(9) Teaching Devices

Instructional programs should make effective use of such appropriate teaching devices as recording and audio-visual components, and supplemental instructional aids like discussion sheets and solutions to exercise problems. All instructional aids should be integrated with course texts, assignments, or examinations.

(10) Illustrations

Illustrations should be used for educational and motivational value.

(11) Printing and Binding

Instructional materials should be legibly reproduced, well manufactured, suitably bound, and attractive in layout and format.

V. Educational Services

(1) Examinations and Other Instructional Services

The submission of lesson examinations and projects which adequately test for achievement of the stated objectives shall be required. Adequate evaluation, correction services, and necessary consultation by a qualified faculty member shall be provided for examinations. Examinations shall be accurately graded and promptly returned.

(2) Handling Student Inquiries for Further Information Relevant to the Instructional Materials

Relevant inquiries from students should be encouraged and answered promptly and

satisfactorily by qualified instructors with due regard for any legal and professional restrictions that apply.

(3) Responsiveness to Individual Differences

Adequate provisions should be made in a realistic manner to meet the individual differences among students in order to assist them in achieving program objectives.

(4) Handling Failures

Students who fail to do satisfactory work should be encouraged to continue and be provided necessary remedial assistance. An appropriate academic dismissal and cancellation policy should be uniformly applied.

(5) Encouragement of Students

A constructive program should be followed to encourage students to start, continue, and complete the courses in which they have enrolled.

(6) Student Evaluation of Courses

Reactions of students should be sought as one basis for evaluating and improving instructional materials and services.

(7) Student Records

Essential student records must be adequately and safely maintained.

VI. Correspondence Degree Examination Proctoring

Reasonable steps must be taken by the institution to assure that the degree candidate has fulfilled the degree requirements under the stipulations of the institution.

In order that the degree have credibility, a minimum requirement is that the student's achievement shall be assessed by proctored final examinations. The proctor shall be a reputable third party. The process for conducting proctored examinations shall be clearly and completely stated by the institution to ensure that the degree candidate who takes the proctored examinations is in fact the same person who enrolled in the prescribed program, and that his examination results will reflect his own knowledge and competence in accordance with stated program objectives.

It is not necessary that all examinations be proctored; however, proctored examinations should be administered at significant points in the degree program. For example, proctored examinations may be required at the completion of the equivalent of one semester of residence work.

VII. Qualifications of Faculty

Faculty members shall be adequately and appropriately prepared for their specific responsibilities and for the unique needs of correspondence education.

(1) Academic Dean

A qualified person shall serve full-time in the capacity of Academic Dean. The Dean shall have overall administrative responsibilities for the educational program.

Full-time is intended to mean a full-time employee of the institution. This person may also have additional duties.

(2) Faculty Members

The institution shall have a sufficient number and diversity of qualified faculty members to give individualized instructional service to each student.

VIII. Library

The library should contain source materials from which correspondence materials developed by the institution were derived. The library should also contain at least

If the correspondence materials were developed by the staff of the institution, the source materials used should be retained in the library for

one copy of all instructional materials used by the institution. Related reference materials in the form of periodicals, journals, and books shall be made available. Library materials should be used by the faculty and program developers. Library materials not available regularly to students but relevant to the educational program should be made available to the student. Wherever a residential phase of a program has been established, library materials shall be available to the student body.

reference by the faculty. Such source materials are not required for published books used or materials developed specifically for the institution by outside authors.

IX. Admission Practices and Transfer Credit

(1) Admission Practices

An accredited institution offering correspondence degree programs shall exercise care to enroll in degree programs only those students who can reasonably be expected to benefit from the instruction.

(2) Eligibility for Admission

The general requirement for enrollment in a degree program is a high school diploma or its equivalent. A high school transcript indicating graduation or certification of equivalency must be available for each student. In the absence of a high school diploma or its equivalent, the institution should take steps to ensure that the student can benefit from the instruction program. Appropriate documentation for justification must be available.

(3) Transfer Credit

Transfer credit should be evaluated as to its applicability to the standards and requirements of the specific correspondence degree program. College degree level courses taken at other educational institutions should be evaluated for possible transfer credit. Equivalent credit may also be granted for industrial, military, or other experience of college level. Validating procedures for granting equivalent credit shall be recorded by the institution.

The form of transfer credit depends upon the curriculum. Transfer credit may refer to semester hours, quarter hours, or continuing education units.

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